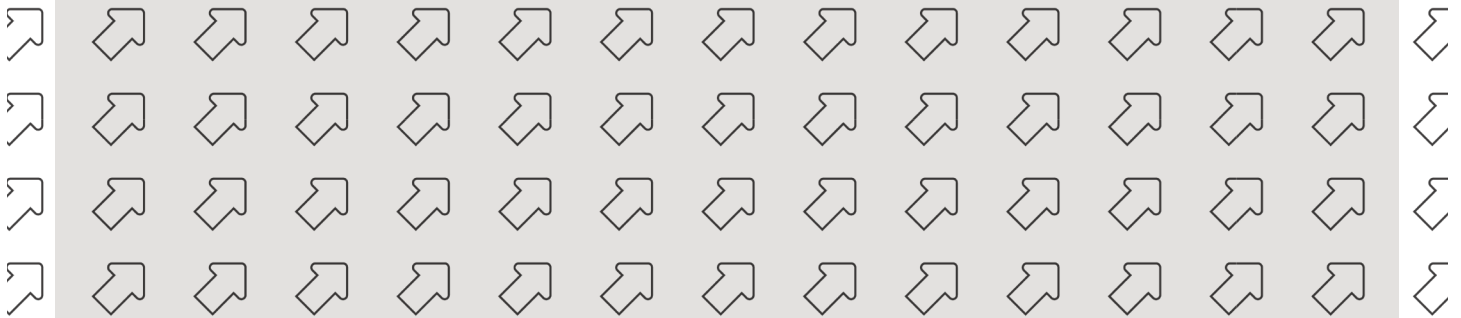


Challenge

Leader Planning Guide



July 13-17, 2026
Kansas City, Missouri



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Why Challenge?

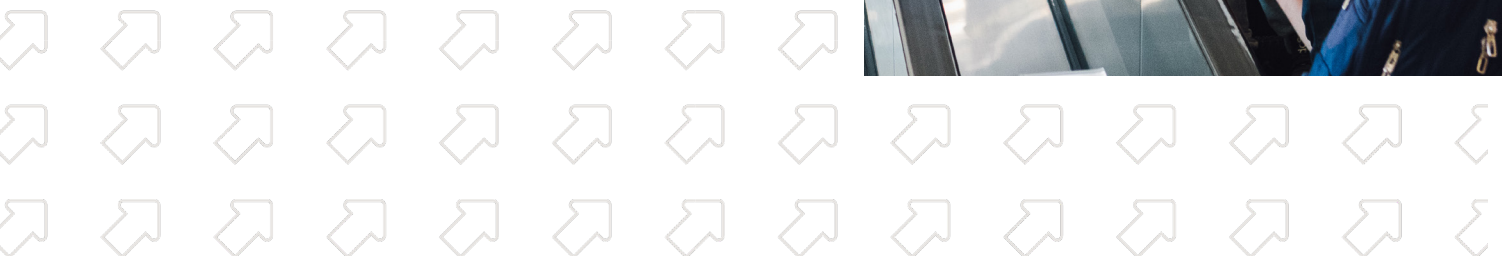


You may ask yourself, *“There are dozens of youth conferences, camps and missions trips I could choose from...what makes Challenge unique?”*

Challenge blends the best of camp, conference and mission trip experiences. This blend creates a catalytic environment that moves beyond the mountaintop moment to building missional momentum within your group.

How do we build true missional momentum?

- Afternoons are designed to be customizable for your specific group needs—service, outreach, prayer, equipping or good old-fashioned fun.
- Speakers, grounded in the gospel, focus on disciplemaking practices rather than emotionally-driven tactics.
- Challenge provides resources for before and after the event to help you steward what you have invested beyond a mere week.
- Relationships between your team and students are prioritized and leveraged because ultimately, people – not events – make disciples.
- Time is provided throughout the week for your group to assess and evaluate students’ individual lives as well as their part in your youth ministry.



What values drive Challenge?

➤ Jesus centered

From start to finish, Challenge is about the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). He's the one we want students remembering and talking about when they go home.

➤ Prayer saturated

Transformation is a supernatural, God-dependent process. Therefore, prayer is not simply a tactic, it is our transformational strategy. When we pray, we know God moves.



➤ Relationally infused

We believe spiritual growth takes place best in the context of relationships. Therefore, we create intentional opportunities to strengthen the connections between students and leaders.

➤ Missionally driven

We long to see a posture of “sent-ness” that moves students out towards others both locally and globally as disciples who make disciples. While at Challenge, we seek to join God in what he’s doing in the city by strengthening local partnerships that will last long after we’re gone.

➤ Synergistically architected

We work hard to create an intentionally integrated environment that infuses the central message throughout each of the diverse components of Challenge to create a stronger learning environment.

What is a customizable schedule?

Challenge provides the opportunity to build your own unique experience.

You know better than anyone what your group needs most and where you want your group heading after the summer. Therefore, each afternoon/early evening you can choose any of the following:



DAILY SCHEDULE

7-9 a.m.	Breakfast
9:30-11 a.m.	Morning Gathering
11 a.m.-1 p.m.	Lunch
1-5 p.m.	Afternoon Options
4:45-6:30 p.m.	Dinner
5:30-7 p.m.	Prayer Moves
7-9 p.m.	Evening Gathering
9-9:45 p.m.	The Huddle
9:45-11 p.m.	Evening Options
Midnight	Lights Out

Outreach

Engage with people in the community through prayer stations and prayer walks, or make a difference in the local community through park and playground renovation, partnering with humanitarian aid organizations or serving a local church.

Equipping labs

Take learning to a new level with a variety of labs that provide students with practical skills for the other 51 weeks of the year.

Prayer moves

Thousands of students voluntarily gather to seek the face of God together.

Recreation

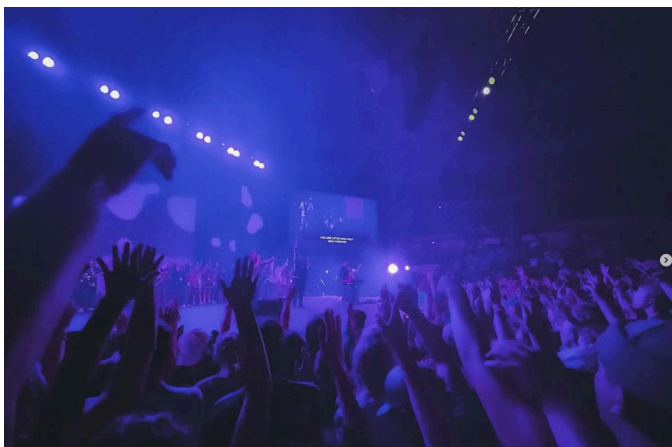
Basketball, volleyball, ultimate frisbee, nine-square, octoball (GaGa ball) and more.

On your own

Take your group off-site to a local attraction

What are people saying about Challenge?

@drecrivers Amazing job to the challenge team and what a joy it was to see so many youth looking to grow in their faith. To God be the glory.



@mmaltby__ This past week, I had the opportunity to join @efcchallenge with @northpointdsmstudents. It was an amazing experience. I saw students grow closer to God and come together as a group, building stronger friendships and making new ones.

A standout moment was during worship on night 4, you could visibly see students connecting with God.

I'm grateful to have been part of this. Thank you to all the students for a great week! I can't wait to see you grow in your faith and hope to lead again at the next Challenge.

Challenge is like diving into the deep end of youth ministry. It is a way to connect with your students in a unique way where they are away from family and school responsibilities and get to know them in ways that might normally take several weeks or months.

—Jonathan Pierson



@alannah.kayyy challenge 24 † ready to raise the bar after a wonderful week learning about, praising, and serving the lord in kansas city!!



@cefc_nxtgen Day 3 of Challenge! We learned about loving our enemies and pleasing God instead of people. We also went to a local church in Kansas City, and got to hear from their pastor. Then, we got to pray over the church and for the city. It was a very impactful day!!

What is the total cost?

Registration Cost

\$359-\$399/person

(see page 20 for details)

Includes:

- 13 meals (Monday dinner; breakfast, lunch and dinner Tuesday through Friday)
- All afternoon and evening options (outreach, equipping labs, recreation and Prayer Moves)
- Transportation to and from service projects
- Guest speakers
- Worship bands
- Personal notebook

Does not include:

- Transportation to and from Kansas City

Lodging Cost

\$193 - \$273/person*

Includes:

- 5 nights at a hotel within walking distance of the Kansas City convention center

**pricing depends on which hotel is secured and assumes 4 people/room (Hotels do not allow more than 4/room unless it is a suite). The Challenge hotel blocks pricing ranges from \$155 - \$219/night.*



Fundraising Tips

Start early

Getting a head start allows you to avoid the pressure of raising all your students' funds from a single event. This also allows extra time for those students who procrastinate in raising their own support. Additionally, if you start fundraising before the tax year ends, you may receive contributions from donors who are looking to make an extra year-end donation for tax purposes.

Individual vs. Group fundraising

Engaging in both individual and group fundraising activities provides multiple ways to raise donations and includes different audiences and types of donors.

Ideas on specific individual and group fundraising activities can be found on the next page.

Individual fundraising

Encourages students to take ownership in the trip. Students who put in effort beforehand often turn out to be more invested while at the event.

Group fundraising

A good way to raise more money than one person could on their own. These donations could be used to cover travel, lodging and other expenses for the entire group.

Don't go it alone

We can't be good at everything. If fundraising is not one of your strengths, ask for help! It's okay to delegate projects to other people. Often, you'll find a parent or adult in the congregation who is able and willing to organize fundraising events. People enjoy being a part of something bigger, so let them help. You just need to ask.

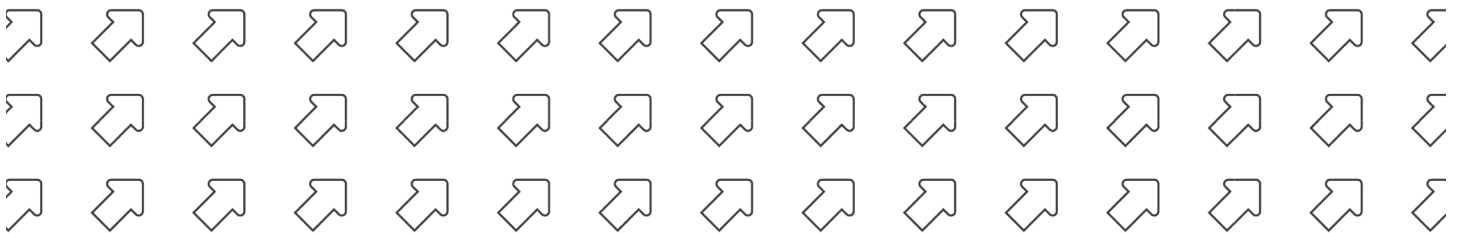


Individual Fundraising Ideas

How can a teenager raise \$300 in ten days?

Day 1	Donate \$20 of your own money to your trip	\$20
Day 2	Ask your parents (or mentors) to donate \$20 each	\$40
Day 3	Ask 2 of your grandparents to donate \$20 each	\$40
Day 4	Ask 3 other family members (aunts, uncles, cousins) to donate \$10 each	\$30
Day 5	Ask 5 friends or co-workers to donate \$10 each	\$50
Day 6	Ask 5 people from your church to donate \$10 each	\$50
Day 7	Ask 3 neighbors to donate \$10 each	\$30
Day 8	Work for 3 hours (babysit, yard care, clean houses, etc.)	\$30
Day 9	Sell something on Craigslist (video games, clothes, toys, etc.)	\$30
Day 10	Repeat Day 8 or 9	\$30

Students may decide to adapt this ten-day list to their specific needs. Some students may not have two parents, or two grandparents, etc. We've found that many students who focus on Day 8 and 9 activities can raise just as much as those who only send out support letters (see page 11 for a sample support letter).



Group Fundraising Ideas

How can a group raise money together?

Raising funds together not only strengthens the bonds among the group, but also gives donors a reason for giving. Some donors may be more generous when they get a service in return for their donation. It also makes the whole process more fun for everyone! Here are some ideas:

Group Fundraising Ideas

RENT-A-STUDENT

Ask people in your congregation or community to “rent” a student. They can ask the student to help rake leaves, clean the attic, or babysit. In return, they donate to that student’s trip. A person could rent one student, or the whole team!

ENVELOPE FUNDRAISER

Number 100 envelopes 1-100. Ask the congregation to take an envelope (at random or of their choosing) and the amount on the envelope is the amount the donor contributes. You will raise over \$5,000 with 100 envelopes, or \$20,000 if you do 200 envelopes!

MAKE A GROUP VIDEO

Social media can play a huge role in raising funds. Creating a video to be shared in church, on social media, and in emails makes it easy for students to reach out to their peers, and allows the message to be shared multiple times. Make sure the video describes the reason and purpose for the trip. It also wouldn’t hurt to have some fun and add funny clips to the video. Finally, if you are able, it also would be helpful to create a way for people to donate online (though, not necessary).

PARENT DATE NIGHT

Youth students host a babysitting service at the church. Parents can drop their kids off for a set amount of time and have a date night. Valentine’s Day would be a great time for this. You can have a set donation amount per each child, or allow parents to donate what they want to give. Parents are usually very generous when it comes to this fundraiser.

ADULT GROUPS/CLASSES

Fundraising gives you an opportunity to tell adults your youth ministry story. Have students go to adult groups and classes in your church to share their personal testimony, what the trip is, why they want to go, and give adults a way to support.

SELL SOMETHING

People are often willing to pay a little extra for something they’d normally purchase when they know it is also adding to a good cause. Consider selling items such as Christmas wreaths, homemade desserts, fair-trade coffee, frozen pizzas, light bulbs (buy LED bulbs in bulk and symbolically show how your group wants to be the light of Christ), etc.

HOST A MEAL

Who doesn’t love a nice home-cooked meal? Ask student’s parents to volunteer to help cook and set-up the meal (breakfast, lunch or dinner). The students will help set-up, serve, and clean-up. They are also encouraged to interact with the guests and explain why they want to go on the trip. As an added benefit, you could include a live or silent auction of items donated by the congregation and students. You can even auction off your students for service projects or babysitting.

SERVE IN THE COMMUNITY

Serve at multiple local organizations in your own community. Ask people to donate toward the work-hours that will be accomplished. It becomes a win-win-win. Your community receives needed volunteers. Donors invest in both the local community and your teens at the same time. Your teens benefit in getting to know your local community and collecting funds for Challenge.

Sample Support Letter

Dear [Name],

I am writing today to invite you to partner with me as I prepare to attend a weeklong national youth gathering: Challenge 2026. On [date] my youth group will be loading up vans and driving to Kansas City. We will participate in outreach throughout the city including partnering with local humanitarian organizations and churches, restoring parks and playgrounds, and participating in prayer walks. We will also be learning about how to live on mission for Christ every day, everywhere, with everyone.

[Student insert personal reason why they want to attend, i.e. "I am really excited to see how God will strengthen my relationship with Jesus during this time," I'm really looking forward to serving Kansas City and praying with people," etc.]

The total cost of this trip is [cost]. Would you prayerfully consider a special gift of \$25-\$100 or another amount of your choosing? I am very excited about this opportunity. Thank you in advance for your gift.

In Him,

[hand-sign name & write a short personal note if applicable]

P.S. To give, please fill out the response card below and return with your check by [date].

[Student's Name]'s Challenge 2026 Trip

Yes, [student's name], I want to help you reach your goal of \$[total trip cost] to serve and strengthen your relationship with Jesus. Here is my gift of:

____\$25 ____\$50 ____\$75 ____\$100 Other:\$_____

Please complete before returning:

Your Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Please return this card, with your check payable to [Name of church] and send to [Church name and address] by [Date]. Please do not write anything in the memo line.

Team Planning

➤ Establish Adult Leaders

PRAY

Before Jesus called the twelve apostles, He spent a night alone praying to God (Luke 6:12-16). Spend some time in prayer and allow God to speak to you. Pray that God would raise up leaders for this particular occasion. Ask that He would bring people to mind who love students and have a servant's heart.

PLAN

Determine what leader-to-student ratio you need. Challenge requires a 10:1 student to leader ratio, per gender (for example, if you have 4 gals and 6 guys coming to Challenge, you would need one leader of each gender).

It is always good to start with adults your students already know (such as youth group leaders), but don't be afraid to reach out to parents or other adults in the congregation you think could be a good fit. Look for adults who will build relationships, participate in activities, and can engage students spiritually. Trips like Challenge are a great "first step" service opportunity that can help in building a volunteer team for fall.

INVITE

Personally invite leaders and explain why you think they'll be a great leader. People respond best to personal invitations rather than broad announcements or emails. Make sure to lay out leader expectations from the very beginning. What will their responsibilities be before and during the trip? Will they need to pay any of their costs?

MEET

Try to have your leaders selected before asking students to register, so they can help encourage students to come. Meet with leaders early-on so they are aware of event details and expectations and to generate excitement. Students won't be excited if the leaders aren't.





Engage Students

PRAY

Make a list of students you want to be a part of Challenge and start praying that God would open their hearts, calendars and resources to be able to come.

PROMOTE, PROMOTE, PROMOTE

Tell your students about Challenge again, and again, and AGAIN! The Challenge website has multiple promotional videos showcasing Challenge from different angles. Utilize social media and personal stories of students who have attended in the past.

STUDENT INFLUENCERS

Teenagers follow teenagers. Work hard on getting your most influential students to attend. Then ask them to personally invite their peers to Challenge through face-to-face invites, personal texts, etc.

ADULT INFLUENCERS

A personal, powerful ask can make the difference: “I want you on this trip. I want to spend this time with you at Challenge.” Encourage the adult leaders to personally invite students to attend.

Involve Parents

PRAY

Every summer, parents are bombarded with opportunities for their kids. Pray for your parents and ask God to provide both wisdom and resources to be able to get behind their son or daughter to be a part of Challenge.

WHY BEFORE THE WHAT

Parents need to know the WHY before the WHAT. What makes this investment in their son or daughter more than just a neat experience? Help them see how this event can benefit their children now and in the future. There is a sample parent letter on page 14 you can use to get parents onboard.

Sample **Parent** Letter



Dear [Name],

We love partnering with you in your teen's spiritual life. I am excited to share with you that as a student ministry we plan to attend Challenge 2026 this coming summer. Challenge 2026 is the Evangelical Free Church of America's national youth gathering.

There are several reasons why our youth ministry chose Challenge as our summer event:

1. Challenge is gospel-centered. We, at [Youth Group Name] earnestly desire that all our events begin and end with solid gospel-centered teaching.
2. Challenge allows students to honestly evaluate their current walk in their faith and helps them take next steps.
3. Challenge equips students to stand confidently in their faith.
4. Challenge provides post-event tools for each student to help them continue to pursue Jesus after the conference.
5. Challenge offers space for our youth ministry team to connect with students on a deeper level—helping us, as youth leaders, to continue to minister to each teenager.
6. Challenge gives students a fuller picture of God at work beyond their own hometown and encourages them that they are not following Jesus alone.

Our group will be traveling to Kansas City [Insert your travel plan: by bus, flight, etc.]. We'll stay in hotels near the convention center where Challenge is held. Additionally, students will have opportunities to serve in the city alongside trusted ministry partners.

Our leadership team hopes you will seriously consider supporting your student in attending Challenge. It is an opportunity I don't want anyone to miss. If you have any questions about this event, please email me at [email address].

In Him,

[sign name]

[Church Name and Staff Position]

Who: Students entering 7th - completion of 12th grade

Dates (includes travel): [insert dates of trip]

Cost (includes transportation, hotel, registration and 13 meals): [insert full cost of trip/person]

Sample *Pastor* Letter



Dear [Name],

I am excited to share with you that as a student ministry, we are planning to attend Challenge 2026, and I want to gain your leadership support. Challenge is the Evangelical Free Church of America's national student gathering. It will be held in Kansas City, Missouri from July 13-17, 2026.

There are several reasons why our youth ministry chose Challenge as our summer event:

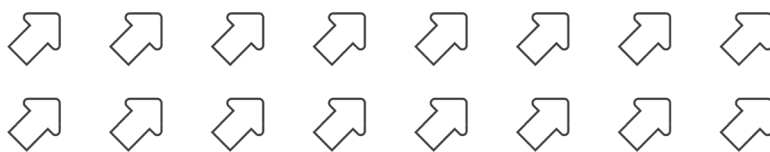
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Please let me know if you have any questions and if we have your leadership support in attending Challenge. It is an opportunity I don't want our students to miss.

In Him,

[sign name]

Road Trip Ideas



The Practical

MULTI-DEVICE CHARGER. To avoid an ultimate teenage melt-down, bring a car charger that can charge multiple devices at once.

FOOD. You don't want to get stuck in a van with a bunch of hungry teenagers and dinner is still an hour and a half away. Tell your students to bring snacks that they can eat in the van.

TRASH BAGS. As a result of the former suggestion, you will want to make sure you bring a few trash bags per van to keep things clean.

Intentional Time

5K PRAYER. Take a few pauses in your trip to engage in a three-mile prayer journey. Choose a theme and have students pair up with a seat partner to pray for specific topics (openness to voice of God, servant attitudes, their schools, etc.) over those three miles.

STORIES. Have students and leaders tell stories from their lives. Not only will this help pass the time, but it will also help students get to know each other! Topics could include: "The craziest thing I have ever done," "My first memory," "3 things you hope will happen in the future," and "Your most embarrassing moment."

MY STORY. Partner students and have them share their faith story, who has been a spiritual influence in their life, or anything to help them get to know one another better.

Fun 'n Games

MUSIC. You gotta have music if you're going to do a road trip right. Create a playlist ahead of time so you can keep your hands on the wheel, and not worry about someone picking a song you don't approve of. Make it fun and pick a few silly and/or meaningful theme songs for the trip. You could also allow students to submit suggestions before the trip!

CAMERA. About halfway through your trip, your students are going to get antsy, and they are going to drive you up a wall unless you distract them. Nominate a leader or student who can get the creative juices flowing and have the kids take funny pictures, or create a music video to a favorite song. Who knows, maybe it will end up going viral! At the very least, it will create some good memories.

MUSICAL CHAIRS. Every time you refuel have students change seats in your vehicle. This will get them next to other people they may not know as well.

WORLD'S LARGEST. Check out this site - www.worldslargestdoc.com/locations - to see if there are any "World's Largest" anything along your route!





FAQ'S

Can I bring my infant/child? Is there childcare?

Both the dynamics of Challenge and its pace do not make a good fit for having infants or young children in attendance, even at a limited capacity, and we do not provide childcare. Therefore we respectfully ask all groups to adhere to the Challenge age minimum (students entering 7th grade).

Can you accommodate food allergies and dietary restrictions?

All of our meals are nut- and shellfish-free. We also provide gluten-free and vegan meal plans upon request. (In the registration process, youth leaders must choose a meal plan for each individual.)

Is there a student-to-leader ratio we need to follow?

Challenge requires a 10:1 student to leader ratio, per gender. For example, if you have four female students and six male students coming, you would need one leader of each gender.

If our church is not in the EFCA, can we attend Challenge?

Yes, absolutely!

Are there logos or photos I can use to promote Challenge?

You can download a variety of Challenge media elements – including logos, promotional photos, and graphics – for the resources section of our website: challengeconference.org/challenge-media

Have a question? Email us at challenge@efca.org

Challenge Checklist

Now – Dec. 2025

- ☐ Get staff and pastors on board (see sample pastor letter on page 15).
- ☐ Watch for the 2025 mailing. Email us at challenge@efca.org if you'd like to be added to our mailing list.
- ☐ Host a parent meeting (or two!). Review page 13 for tips on engaging parents.
 - Bring parent letter, trips dates, total cost (including hotel, travel and extra meals), our promotional video, a Challenge brochure (optional).
- ☐ Personally invite adult leaders.
- ☐ Personally invite student leaders and ask them to invite their friends.
- ☐ Promote during your youth group meeting every week.
 - Show videos, share student testimonies, hang posters.
- ☐ Finalize adult leaders.
- ☐ Finalize numbers and collect deposits

Jan. – May 2026

- ☐ Register for Challenge!
 - Early-Bird Rate (1/15/26 – 4/15/26): \$359/person
 - Regular Rate (4/16/26 – 6/15/26): \$399/person
- ☐ Book lodging. Hotel information will be sent to you after you register (deadline is June 15).
- ☐ Register for outreach (deadline is June 15).
- ☐ Recruit a prayer team (students, parents, congregation).
- ☐ Fundraise: Review pages 8-10 for ideas.
- ☐ Plan transportation.
 - Consider partnering with a nearby church.
 - Book transportation arrangements.
- ☐ Register for the transportation shuttle from the Kansas City airport (if needed).
- ☐ Collect final payments from students.
- ☐ Consider planning a “Day of Prayer and Fasting.”

June 2026

- ☐ June 15: Last day to register, reserve hotel rooms, and – without penalty – cancel hotel rooms.
- ☐ June 19: Final payment due; verify all of your attenders have completed the waiver.
- ☐ Confirm transportation arrangements, including airport shuttle if necessary.
- ☐ Meet with parents, students and adult leaders.
- ☐ Review the confirmation booklet and conference guidelines with parents, students and leaders.
- ☐ Encourage students to bring cash for offering.
- ☐ Update your prayer base before you leave.



Registration Opens **January 15, 2026**

\$359

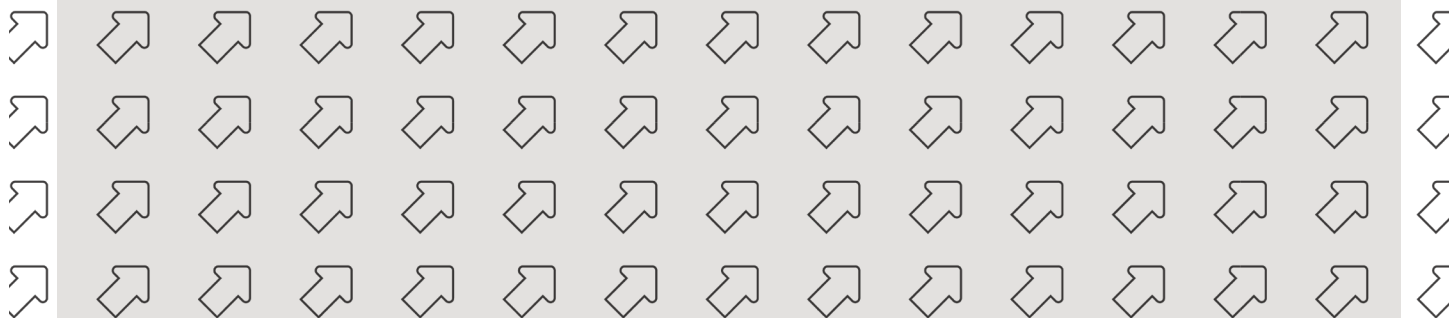
early-bird rate

Register by April 15

\$399

regular rate

Register by June 15



CHALLENGE 

July 13-17, 2026
Kansas City, MO